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Week Two - Pupdate

The six young Labradors in CIA's fall puppy class – Suni, Nicole, Indigo, Lulu, Freya, and Heide – have graduated from the booth and are now learning new scents out on the training room floor. The ladies performed so well in the booth, in fact, that they began their floor exercises two days earlier than most previous classes!

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As each pup enters the training facility, they scramble across the smooth linoleum floor, feet going every-which-way, so full of excitement and spastic puppy enthusiasm that they can barely keep their paws underneath them.

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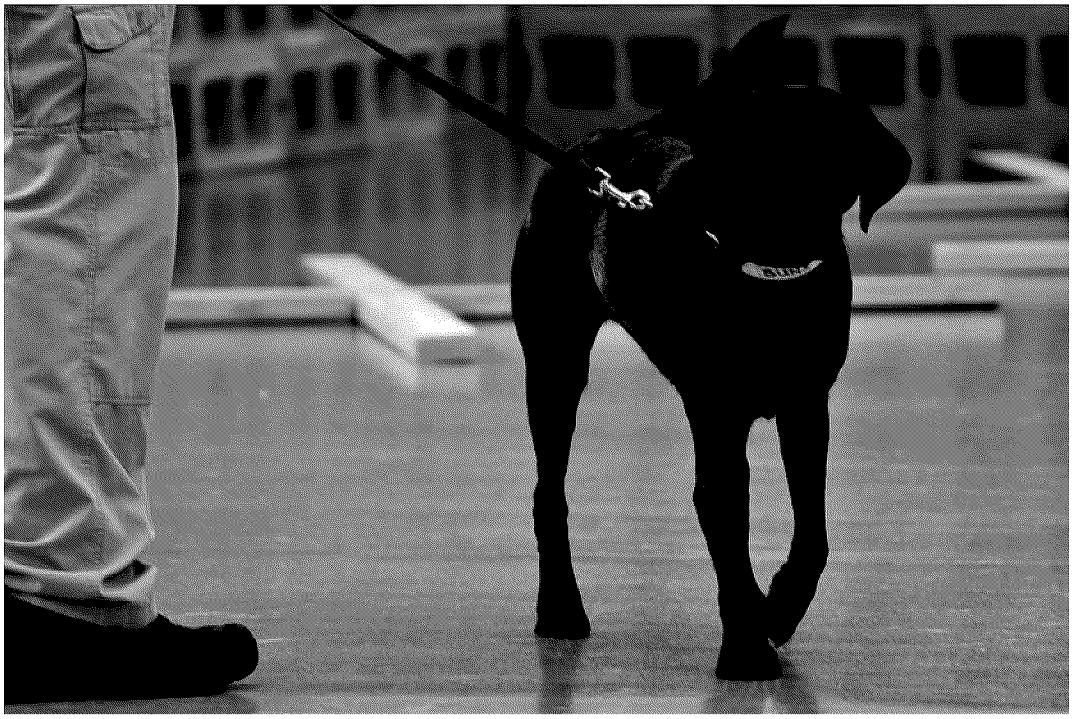
K9 instructor Steve walks Suni into the room and lets her off her leash. She spots Andy, the lead instructor, freezes, and stares at him. When Andy looks back at her, she gives him "the look." Before he can react, she bolts across the floor at full speed, leaps off the ground into his chest, feet first, then bounces off. While he regains his balance after being hit by a 60lb flying Labrador, she prances off back toward Steve, tail wagging, in a happy-dance canine swagger.

Suni loves to play as much as she loves to work!



The first week of classes on the training room floor are focused on what the trainers call "line discrimination" – essentially the pups are learning to find the two scents they've been imprinted on in cans spread across the floor.

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Remember the gallon cans the trainers used during their **puppy evaluations**? They'll be seeing a lot of those for the remainder of imprint training. That's because the trainers use those cans to form lines, circles, and various odd shapes for the pups to search.

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The trainers place the tiny tins containing the scents into aluminum quart cans, which are then placed inside the larger metal gallon cans. As they add new scents for the pups to learn (i.e. be imprinted on) they'll now do so using these cans.

The pups also learn two important concepts. The first is "seek" – which means to search for the explosive odor. The second is to "sit" when they find a "hot" (i.e. explosive odor).

The dogs need a quiet, calm way to indicate to their handler that they've found an explosive scent. The trainers teach the pups to sit because when they find an explosive in real life, they don't want the dogs to bark, pick up, or in anyway disturb a possible bomb.

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The cans are first arranged in straight lines. The trainers present a can to the pup by walking backwards and using their hand to show the pup where to sniff (kind of like Vanna White on Wheel of Fortune showing the puzzles to be solved).

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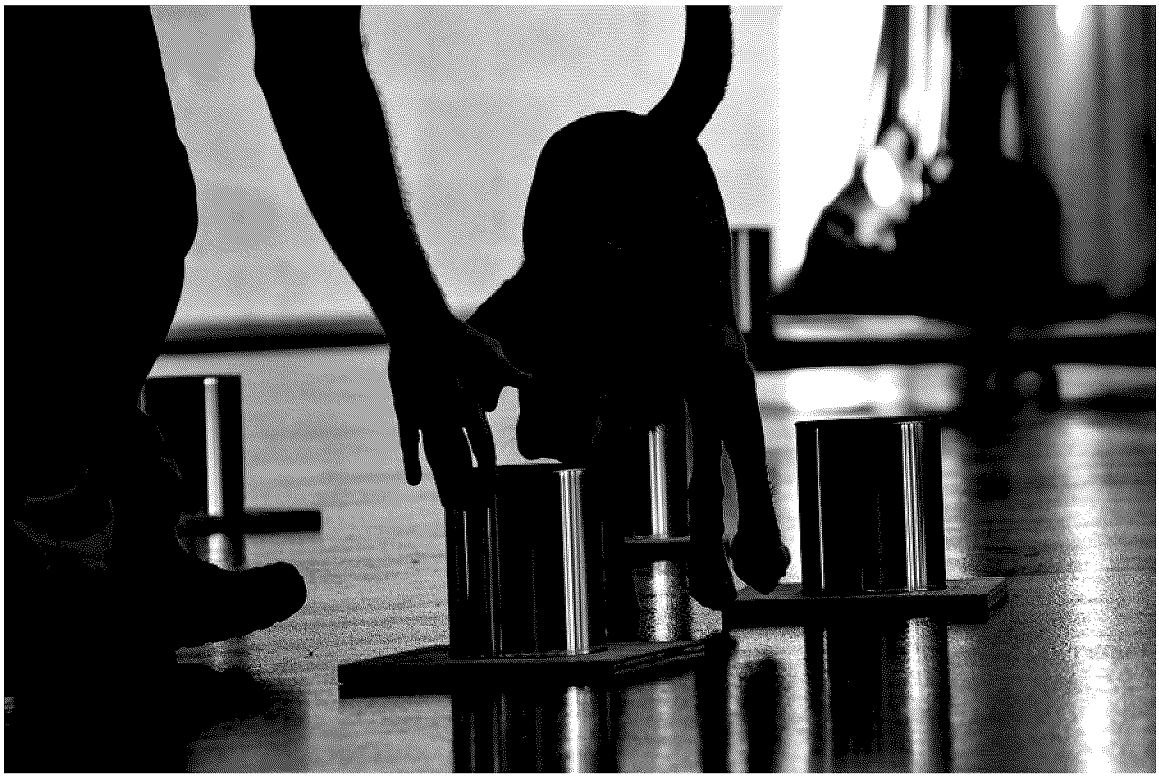
It's a lot more difficult than it looks. Every new handler is exhausted after the first time they run a can line. The motion needs to be fluid and the movement precise – it's like a choreographed dance between handler and dog.



Andy runs Suni through the can lines, and she catches on quickly, excitedly searching each can for the explosive scents.

Indigo and Steve are next. When she sniffs the can with the black powder and sits, Steve erupts into a high-pitched reverie of "Good girl!!! That's my baby! Good girl, Indy!!!" and gives her some kibbles. Indigo is so excited she can barely contain herself. She stays in a sit, but her front paws tap-dance in a frantic beat in anticipation of a kibble.

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Watching grown men, some of them former Marines, jumping around and squealing in high-pitched tones, dancing with dogs who are squirming and wiggling and wagging like hamburgers are falling from the sky is amusingly startling the first time you see it. The trainers are pros at it. They have no shame. It's all about getting the dogs excited and making sure they're having fun while learning their new jobs.

Often new handlers, usually men, have the most difficult time with this part of the training. Someone who has been a police or military officer for most of their career usually isn't accustomed to gallivanting around an open warehouse, clapping their hands and talking in silly, high-pitched cartoon voices. It can take some prodding from the more experienced hands, and seeing how the dogs respond (or don't respond), to finally get the new handlers to break out their inner clown.

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The pups all quickly learn that they need to sniff the cans and find the scents they've been taught. It's amazing how fast they catch on. What's even more surprising, however, is how quickly they learn to outsmart the trainers.

Next week: See how the pups try to outsmart the trainers, and **what the trainers have to do** to stay one step ahead of the dogs.

If you miss any of the articles in this series, visit "**Follow CIA's New Puppy Class!**" main page, where we are chronicling the puppies' progresses throughout their training.

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